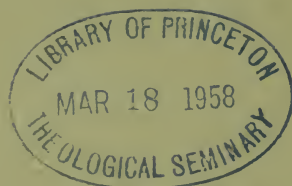


Meade C. Williams

A Glance
at the
Higher Criticism

BS500
.W72



BS600
.W72

Warner Library

A Glance

at the

Higher Criticism



By

Meade C. Williams, D.D.

1904

The Winona Publishing Company
Chicago

A GLANCE
AT THE
HIGHER CRITICISM



BY
MEADE C. WILLIAMS, D.D.

CHICAGO, ILL.

THE WINONA PUBLISHING COMPANY

COPYRIGHT, 1904

BY

THE WINONA PUBLISHING COMPANY

A GLANCE

AT THE

HIGHER CRITICISM

My object is not so much to controvert, as to briefly set forth the nature of, the Higher Criticism, and to present what it to-day deems its assured results. The general reader will better understand what it is by considering the demands it makes on our acceptance. We will let these demands speak for themselves.

The term Higher Criticism does not carry its meaning on its face. It is a technical term, and somewhat arbitrary as a designation. The word "criticism," as applied to the Scriptures, perhaps to some suggests hostility and opposition. But that sense of the word is secondary. Criticism strictly means discerning, hence inquiry and ascertainment. Biblical criticism is the due weighing of the questions which pertain, not so much to the interpretation of the contents of Scripture (that is Biblical exegesis) as to the external form and vehicle which brings these contents. Hence, Biblical criticism is an entirely legitimate thing. It has always been included in the curriculum of studies in all our best theological seminaries. While there is rationalistic criticism and destructive criticism, there is also believing and reverent criticism.

This external form of Biblical study is of two departments: (1) The question of text—that is, the ascertainment of the correct Hebrew and Greek originals. (2) The questions of authorship, date, structure, scope, place in the progressive series of books, etc. The German scholars, about one hundred years ago, distinguished between these two departments by calling them

respectively "Lower Criticism" and "Higher Criticism." The investigation of early manuscripts, the study of early versions, and the Scripture citations in the writings of the Early Fathers, with the view of ascertaining the true text—which with us has generally been called textual criticism—this they called "Lower Criticism." The other line of study, that is, authorship, time of composition, style of writing, historical setting, etc.—work pertaining to the contents of the books, and thus a higher study than that of the text, which only conveys the contents—this was called "Higher Criticism." Or, as some would understand the rationale of the terms, one was called lower inasmuch as the text of a book is the substratum, while the other is known as higher as being that which grows out of or upon the text.

Now, such studies are not only legitimate, but profitable. And Higher Criticism, as far as the term goes, and in its historical sense, is proper and needful. Dissociated from certain methods and perilous principles and certain alleged results, it would create no alarm. But as a matter of fact, it has come to-day to stand for a particular system and method and spirit, which is revolutionary in the whole standpoint of viewing the Scriptures. It has gone beyond its legitimate scope, and is made to include such methods in its work as imagination, inferences, conjecture, the psychological sense, and especially the philosophy of development, or evolution. It shows its ulterior aim, likewise, by invading the field of theology, so that many who have but a dim understanding of what is meant by Higher Criticism conceive of the work, as it is now pressed, as pertaining chiefly to the system of doctrine. And this is only a natural inference of the popular mind. The critics are not content with making certain judgments relative to the age, the structure, and authorship of the Biblical books. They seek an end beyond that. The

whole theological creed must likewise be delivered from "traditionalism." Prof. Cheyne expresses the hope that through criticism a transformation in the theology of the church may be effected; and Dr. Briggs confessed, many years ago, that the Higher Criticism of the Bible had "brought about in his mind a different conception in every department of theology."

The most authoritative and most representative exponents of the new criticism are of the rationalistic school, and they do not hesitate to ascribe to those we call sacred writers, who claim to speak in the name of the Lord and as moved by the Holy Spirit, mistakes ignorance, blunders, fraudulent methods, and sometimes deceit. As Justice Brewer, of the United States Supreme Court, recently said, speaking of the iconoclastic critic of the day: "To him the Bible appears merely as a sort of crazy quilt of untrue history, distorted science, weak poetry, impractical morality and vague foreshadowings of the unknown and unknowable." The setting of the different books, their unit character, their place in the historical development of the people, and their relation to the periods when the different religious and ethical teachings were given—that these are not at all as they seem. Of many of the books it is claimed they are but patchwork and conglomerates, fragments by different writers of far separated times pieced together, and although finally brought under the supervising and editing hand of some redactor, or a succession of redactors, yet often very awkwardly done. In what they consider the work of "rightly dividing the word of truth," they claim ability to discriminate in the authorship, not only of different parts of a book, but of a chapter, and of a single verse or sentence even; and in a fine critical sense, and nicety of distinction, they assign to different imaginary writers "each his portion in due season" through the centuries of Jewish history. These unknown writers they designate as the Jehovist,

the Elohist, the Priestly writer, the Deuteronomist, and the Redactor, first, second or third, as the case may be. It may be likened to the printer after he takes the type off the press, distributing it into the different boxes of his case;* or to the analytical chemist, with his retort resolving a substance into its original elements. And just as the chemist designates his hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, carbon, etc., by the standard initials, H, O, N and C, and sometimes also makes the compounds HO, HN, etc., so the critic likewise, as he disintegrates the early Scriptures and resolves them back to their "last reduction," has his cabalistic letters, E, J, P, D, and R, and his combinations, too, JE, JP, R₂, R₃, etc., etc.

The criticism at work to-day is a philosophy, as well as a study of Bible structure. Evolution is the basic concept. I do not say all their views of Scripture questions are determined by that philosophy, but that it regulates, and, shall I say, often biases their investigations. It rules out the direct and special interposition of God in the history of Israel, and allows only the factor of naturalism, or, what they would call a "normal human development." It is true, some of the critics, or, perhaps many of them, use the word "supernatural," and will even insist on it. But all depends on the definition of that term. And when you find that many of them mean by it but little more than simply a theistic conception of the universe, that God's hand is in human history, and that an intelligent and active providence directs all things—this, as in contrast with a blind, unintelligent, and merely natural order of things—you realize that the word with them comes far short of the signification which usually attaches to it in religious thought.

* Or, perhaps, it might be better illustrated—from the critic's view-point—by an unfortunate "piecing" of the type and he, like the printer, having to properly assort.

II.

There are those in the Church, good men and often conspicuous in position and service, who refuse to see that any interest is endangered by the present phase of Biblical criticism. In a supine and easy-going optimism they fancy the issue now forced upon us is a small matter, and of but passing moment. Their only conception of the question seems to be whether Moses was the actual writer of the Pentateuch, whether David wrote all the Psalms, and whether there was one Isaiah or two. And their thought is, Why vex ourselves over problems so inconsequential? Since we have those books, and can read them just the same, the question of their authorship should not be allowed to disturb practical Christian men.

Need I say this is but the merest fringe of the subject? It is an utterly superficial judgment, and is unworthy of any who presume to be public teachers or observers of the current Biblical thought. If Moses, under divine direction, may have compiled from earlier sources, and incorporated in his records certain documents of different writers with varying styles of composition; or if occasional addenda, of the nature of footnotes or parenthical sections or appendices, were afterwards inserted by those authorized to deal with the oracles of God; or even if Moses' authorship were still further reduced in slight particulars—if this were all the critics meant, the issue would not be so serious. The same might be said, were there necessity for it, in regard to the claim that two or more writers figure in the Book of Isaiah. But it is puerile to thus belittle the issue. The critic's contention is not so simple. It is the question of trustworthiness, and the question of period or time when these writings appeared, more than the question of their authorship. It is

whether or no these writings of the Pentateuch, for instance, are (1st) a credible record as to characters who figure on their pages, as to representations they make of God, and as to facts and events which they relate as history; and (2d) whether they are, as they purport to be, a record substantially contemporary of a revelation made in the time of Moses, and during his leadership—in other words, whether or no we have therein an authoritative revelation at all.

It has often been declared by some of the disciples of the Higher Criticism that it has made the Bible a new book. In one sense at least we can admit this claim. In its reconstruction of the book the order and arrangement of the writings is all changed, and apparently after the method of "topsy turvy." It is as if when gazing at a particular formation in a kaleidoscopic glass the critic's hand gives it a turn and the whole arrangement is instantly changed. The Pentateuch is disrupted into many fragments, which in their authorship are scattered over a period of four centuries, the earliest date in which was several hundred years after Moses' time. Isaiah is broken up into what has been called an "anthology of collected prophetic utterances," and generously distributed through two hundred years, though in the main ascribed to two writers—Isaiah proper, and the unknown or second Isaiah, with a century and a half between them. To the plain reader, the Old Testament appears as a unified, coherent and progressive course of revelation, each book having its own character and its own purpose. But by the Critic very much of it is regarded as a confused unordered jumble of writings and fragments of writings, which it is his province to overhaul and "sort out" and readjust. Often they report chapters in the same book, and verses in the same chapter, and even sentences in the same verse, lying as strange bed-fellows and "unequally yoked together," which they must bring

into orderly sequence. Or again, it is to them like Ezekiel's vision of the bones lying in a miscellaneous heap, and theirs it is, by the wand of criticism, to bring them together, "bone to his bone."

As presenting a bird's-eye view, from their standpoint, of the time and the order in which the books, and the several portions of the divisible books of the Old Testament, were written, we have the following schedule. It has been indorsed by Dr. Harper's magazine as constructed according to the "true canons of historical and literary criticism." The first portion of Scripture, according to this outline, and the only part written before the establishment of the monarchy, is the Song of Deborah, found in the Book of Judges. We have nothing more until the period of the Kings, when David's Song of the Bow appears, and a small fragment of two verses of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple. The next bit of our Scriptures did not appear until after the kingdom was divided, when the "so-called blessing of Jacob" (Gen. xlix.), and the Book of Covenant (Exod. xx.-xxiii.) were composed. Then come portions of Judges and Samuel, and accounts concerning Elijah and Elisha. Between the times of King Jehosaphat and Hezekiah, a period say, of 150 years, appeared portions of Isaiah, some of the Minor prophets and the historical portions of the Pentateuch which, however, at subsequent periods, down as late as the fourth century B. C., were more or less revised. During this general period, too, some unknown poet wrote the "so-called blessing of Moses" (Deut. xxxiii.) several centuries after Moses' death, and called his, as Prof. Cheyne explains, only as it is "what would have been his last words if he had lived in that day"! In the time of King Josiah our Deuteronomy (or, all but a few chapters of it) appeared; also the Song of Hannah. Several different writers had a hand in what is known as the prophecy of Isaiah, although

the great part of it is to be attributed to two—the prophet Isaiah himself and the Deutero-Isaiah, or “the great Unknown” as he is also called. The elaborate ritual system, as we have it in Leviticus and in parts of Exodus and Numbers, was not written until after the Exile. The composition of the earliest Psalm is put in Jeremiah’s day, while the most of them do not appear until after the return from Babylon, and some of them as late as the Maccabean age. The Book of Daniel is assigned to a period as far along as 164 B. C.

III.

The controversy raised by the Higher Criticism began with the Pentateuch, though it has gone far beyond that now. (With these five books there has more recently been joined the book of Joshua, as pertaining to the same general period which preceded the settlement in Canaan, and in the Critic’s terminology Hexateuch has, to a degree, superseded Pentateuch.) The controversy arose in this way:

The Pentateuch relates the formation of what is known as the three codes of Israel. They are represented in these books as given successively in the time of Moses, and all of them through the instrumentality of Moses. The Critics change all this, and bring them along at three different stages, widely remote from each other, and extending over a period of more than a thousand years.

1. There is what is known as the Covenant Code. This is found about the middle of the book of Exodus, containing the decalogue with certain regulations pertaining to the civil and domestic life of the people and other miscellany of a simple kind.

According to the Critics’ theory respecting the chronological appearance of the Old Testament writings (as we saw above), the Song of Deborah, found in the

book of Judges, was the earliest production to appear in its present literary form. This brief "Covenant Code" they ascribe to Moses, but not in its present form. The Ten Commandments, for instance, as they tell us, were greatly amplified at a later day—they being in their first promulgation a simple declaration, each of but a single sentence. So the Covenant Code, while ascribed to Moses, was his but in the germ—a "tincture" of Moses, as the druggist would say. And this is the extent of his literary work. With the remaining 183 chapters, which make up what is popularly called the five books of Moses, he had nothing to do, whether as author, or compiler, or editor of earlier annals. And not only is their authorship wrested from *him*—if that were all, the case would not be so serious—but it is wrested from his *age*, and from that whole initial period of Israel's history, and assigned to periods 800 and 1,000 years after Moses, and attributed to unknown writers, of whom there is not a shred of historical record or Jewish tradition—writers purely supposititious and imaginary. It is thus made necessary to revise our conceptions of the man who has always been known as the Hebrew Lawgiver, and the chief of the sacred writers. But, as no one ever knew of Moses' sepulcher, so, according to the new teaching, if he left any writings, "no man knoweth of it until this day," and we are forced to exclaim, as the people once did to Aaron, "As for this Moses we wot not what has become of him."

The second Code is called the Deuteronomic, because found in the book of that name, popularly known as the fifth book of Moses. Here I recite some familiar Old Testament history. Toward the close of the book of Deuteronomy we read that "when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law until they were finished," he commanded the Levites to put it in the side of the ark of the covenant, that it might be there

for a witness against the people. After the temple was built under Solomon, this together with other articles of sacred deposit, were presumably placed there. Eight hundred years passed away, and we are in the reign of King Josiah of Judah. Idolatry and the worship of the high places had been prevailing. The law, as a whole, was largely forgotten among the people. Even to good King Josiah much of it was unknown. The temple copy which Moses, hundreds of years before had ordered to be put in the ark, was lost. Josiah was having repairs made in the temple, under charge of Hilkiah the High Priest. One day the king sent Shaphan, the scribe, a member of his cabinet, on a commission to the temple in connection with the repairing work then under way. After the business was finished Hilkiah, the priest, takes occasion to tell Shaphan of a wonderful discovery he has made while the repairs were going on. "I have found," he said, "the book of the law in the house of the Lord," and he gave it to him to read. Shaphan took it to the king and read it to him. The king was overwhelmed in astonishment, and terror and grief, for in the book of the sacred law he learns of provisions and requirements in the matters of public religion, and of divine threatenings in case of their neglect, which he had not known of before, and which the nation had long been violating. He rends his clothes in his lamentation, and immediately proceeds to measures of religious reformation throughout the kingdom.

Now this is the Scripture account, and it seems a very plain and credible narrative. But our friends, the Critics, will not have it so. They assume, to begin with, that this was not the whole law, but only those portions contained in Deuteronomy. (This question we will not pause to consider.) They cannot allow that Deuteronomy was written in Moses' time. That early age was not capable of a literary production of

that kind. Let us then hear their story about it. Their story runs thus: In the corruption and degeneracy of the times, some of the leaders of the people, both priests and nobles, desired to improve the public condition. In those days the end justified the means, and a pious fraud was resorted to. As yet they had in written form only the small Covenant Code of Moses. They thought if they had more law code it would greatly help in the work of reformation. But to be authoritative, it must be supposed to carry a divine sanction, and to have come through an accredited servant and minister of the Lord. Whose name could be associated with it so suitably as that of Moses, who, under God, had led the people from Egypt, and had laid the foundations of their theocratic state? His was the name to conjure with. So some one wrote this book of Deuteronomy, or almost the whole of it, some eight hundred years after Moses was dead. As one of the Critics says: "The book was certainly written about the time of its discovery," and he adds, "most likely it was written by Hilkiiah himself." In the absence, however, of any name of the writer the Critics simply call him the Deuteronomist, and for short he has been adopted by them as D. But the reforming party "palmed it off" as Moses' book. The writer dated it back to Moses' time, and was careful throughout to use such declarations as these: "Moses said, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day." "Moses spake these words unto all Israel." And again, "These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab." To make the fraud still more evident, the writer, assuming all the time to be Moses in the wilderness of Moab, before the Jordan was crossed, speaks of the conquest of Canaan and the subjugation of the people and the destruction of their cities, as if all this were a thing of

the future yet to be accomplished under Joshua, although not written until hundreds of years after those events had passed into history!

Thus the book was put in shape, the Critics tell us, and was laid away in the temple, ready to be "discovered" as a happy "find" when the best opportunity should arrive. The opportunity arrived as we have seen, in the coming of Shaphan to Hilki'ah.

The Critics gently denominate this wily trick as a "literary fiction," and they justify it, or at least condone it; although some of them are frank enough to allow that it cannot be defended from our standpoint of morality. Plain people, however, can only see in such a procedure the stamp of fraud. For it is evident the purpose was to make it pass as the genuine work of Moses. They certainly succeeded, too. The king and the people were deceived. And thus, too, all the succeeding Jewish people were deceived—their rabbis and scholars and historians, the believers of the days of Jesus and his apostles, and the entire Christian world likewise, ever since, with the exception of certain of the Critics of the last hundred and fifty years—and they "think it strange that we run not with them to the same excess of riot" in conjecture and hypothesis. They confess it does not comport with "modern and Western" ethics that a writing should be attributed to Moses which Moses neither wrote nor could have written. But the difference between modern and Western notions and the notions which prevailed in early Bible times makes it all easy! It is certain, says one of these critics discoursing on Deuteronomy, that even in this day Oriental writers of the highest character and of the most burning zeal for religion would act in this manner without a qualm of conscience. This we are not concerned to deny. But we will not admit the moral parity of the non-Christian religions of the East with the religion of Israel which taught the

ninth Commandment, and which forbade the circulation of a "false report," and which trained its followers to say, "I hate every false way." It would seem fairer and less confusing if our critics who thus gloss over the practice of fraud and deceit would cease employing the word inspiration as having any special meaning in relation to the books of the Bible.

IV.

Following the Covenant Code and the Deuteronomic Code came the Priest Code. It is contained, principally, in the latter part of Exodus and throughout Leviticus and Numbers, and is known as P. in the Critics' nomenclature. It relates the construction of the Tabernacle, the establishment of the Levitical Priesthood, the appointment of the feasts, the regulations about clean and unclean, the laws of sacrifice and offerings, and the whole minute ceremonial system. Now all this is represented in the Scriptures as given through the instrumentality of Moses "according to the pattern shewed him in the mount," and under the direction of God, as expressed in the formulæ so continually recurring, "The Lord spake unto Moses," and "Thus did Moses according to all that the Lord commanded him."

But the Critics will not have it so. According to them Moses had no hand in this Priest Code. And not only did he not introduce it, but he never even conceived of such a work. Nor did any one else in that age. It was beyond the possibility of conception or device in that early period of Israel's development. It was an evolution in religious ritual which developed during, or after the Exile in Babylon, a thousand or twelve hundred years subsequent to Moses. The Tabernacle, the Critics do not hesitate to say, was a "pure fiction." The Exodus tale of Bezeleel and Aholiab, in whose hearts the Lord put wisdom as its artificers,

they take as a mere touch of fancy. And all the historical setting in the Pentateuch, in which that structure figures, and the Lord's explicit directions to Moses concerning it, and the record that reads, "So Moses finished the work"—all this counts for nothing. And yet further, according to the Critics, not only was the Tabernacle never built in Moses' time, but it was never built at all in anybody's time. It was conceived in the period of the Babylonish Exile, written up by some unknown author as if constructed by Moses, and without any objective reality whatever it remained as nothing other than a work of imagination, or an ideal. And yet it, together with the whole elaborate Levitical system associated with it, comes to us imbedded in all the historical setting of the Israelites' career in the wilderness, their tent life, their encampment according to tribes around the Tabernacle as a common center, their episodes of experience, their manna food, their marchings, with the taking down and putting up of the structure, its altar, its holy of holies, its shekinah, the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire—and Moses as the presiding genius of it all!

I cannot refrain from a single question in this connection. Had Moses never figured in any literary or legislative work in Israel's early history beyond the very limited portion of Pentateuchal record which the Critics will allow him; had he never been known as the Lawgiver in the sense in which the New Testament speaks when it says, "The law came by Moses," and had his fame been none other than that of an able and resourceful Captain who had led the people out of Egypt, and during their forty years of wilderness life—then, I ask, would his name have carried such spell in the work of a very different kind with which, whether as a pious fraud or a literary device, they assumed to connect it for its "taking" effect? Lyman Abbott says the critics recognize in Moses one of the greatest and most creative

spirits of ancient history. But without now asking what historical data and material they have for their very eulogistic judgment, after stripping Moses, as they do, of so much that the records attribute to him, we may well question if it was sagacious in the reformers of King Josiah's time, and in those, subsequently, who sought to rehabilitate the ecclesiastical system of the Jews after their return from Babylon, to seek weight for the new "Scriptures" of those periods by issuing them under the name of one who, while honored by tradition in other lines of exploit, had never figured in literature. And would it greatly have helped these writings to "go down" with the people? If Moses' name bore a spell and a conjuring power in those latter days, must it not have been principally for the very same reason that he stands pre-eminent to-day, despite the Critics, because identified with the giving of the law, and with the institution of what, until this day of the modern criticism, has always been known as the "Mosaic Economy?"

So have the Critics chosen to deal with the three codes, in a manner which falls in with their theory of an evolutionary progress. (1) The Covenant Code, a few simple ideas largely ethical, as suggested by the Commandments, or "the Ten Words," as they often prefer to name them, and which, in a brief and rudimentary form, they assign to his hand. (2) After an interval of eight hundred years the Deuteronomic Code appeared, with stress laid on ethical features and linked in sympathy with the rising prophetism of that day. (Prophetism became a force in the religious life of the nation, the Critics claim, prior to the priest and altar period, so that the phrase, "The law and the prophets," so frequent in the New Testament, must needs, chronologically speaking, be inverted to read "the prophets and the law.") (3) The Priest Code, elaborated during the period of the exile and the return to Jerusalem, and due largely, as the Critics say, to the ambition of the

Priest party who, as the nation then had no king and no civil supremacy, aimed to make themselves the predominant influence.

V.

Having accustomed themselves to such freedom and arbitrariness as respects the structure of Scripture, it is not surprising to find this class of critics "very bold" in their judgments as respects its authority. They do not hesitate to discredit many of its statements of fact, and to regard as myths, legends, fables, sagas and poetic embellishments very much that Scripture presents as historical narrative. It is not merely that they treat one or two, or three items in early Genesis as mythical, but if you question concerning other instances throughout Old Testament times, clear down to the end of that dispensation—events which in any degree suggest the marvelous or the miraculous—you will be amazed by the large amount of Scripture which they consign to the same realm of the legendary and the un-historical.

The origin of man, the temptation scene in the garden, the deluge, the tower of Babel, the Sodom and Gomorrah incident, etc., these they declare to be myths. The patriarchs, presented so extensively through successive generations, had no personal reality. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob never existed. They are only names, and nothing else, standing sometimes for tribal designations, sometimes for personified virtues. The theophanies they regard as Oriental fancies. Moses was a real character, but the narrative of his childhood in Egypt, and his subsequent dealings with Pharaoh, and much else that is related of him, is largely imaginary. And beyond the bare fact that "the clan Jacob" once sojourned in Egypt, and were oppressed and escaped in some way to the wilderness under the lead of Moses, there is but little

in the tale which commands their confidence. The books Joshua and Judges, in the view of the Critics, abound in legend and fabulous folk-lore. Doubt is thrown over the story of the childhood and youth of Samuel. David is ruthlessly stripped of what they are pleased to call the "embellishments of tradition." Prior to his accession to the throne, they represent him as merely a rough "freebooter." Nor, after he became king can they allow that he was a nursing father to the Israelitish Church, nor a poet, nor a psalm-writer; and his religion was of "the most primitive type."

They see this same legend-building imagination in the memoirs of Elijah; and of course the same free hand is shown in respect to what George Adam Smith describes as "the series of curious marvels attributed to Elisha." Daniel had no hand in the book of that name. Indeed, according to the Critics, there never was a Daniel, at least as corresponding to the character and experience portrayed. The Scripture which goes by that name they assign to as late a date as the second century before Christ. The unknown author simply transported himself in imagination back four hundred years to the alleged writer's day, and in an unbridled play of fancy depicted the heroism of an imaginary Daniel, and under the guise of prediction, and representing it as a communication from "a God in heaven who revealeth secrets," set forth, as pertaining to the history of the future, events which had already come to pass.

All this time it must be remembered, too, that the God of Israel, whom we call Jehovah (whom many of the Critics prefer to designate as Jahweh), was not known by them as the God of the whole earth, the one living and true God, but as a local God only, whose home had been in the southern desert, and whom Moses found when keeping Jethro's flock, and who became the God of Israel in a local sense, just as other nations

had their gods. Monotheism, or the doctrine of one God only, was a subsequent development, and not taking the complete form, they tell us, until the ninth century B. C.

With the representation of modern criticism, as just given, as also in the preceding pages of this writing, the question may arise in some minds, Is it not a too sweeping generalization to class all the critics together? Are there not conservative critics as well as radical? Yes, I suppose we can distinguish—although the word “conservative” has become an indefinite term, and may mean little or more, according to the thought of him who raises the question. At the same time we have to say, concerning the modern school, that the so-called conservative critics, while not concurring in every opinion of their radical brethren, and while often showing an evangelical spirit, and an active sympathy with the Gospel of the kingdom, yet work with them on the same general principles and methods, and reach, in the main, the same conclusions. They are at one with them in the view that the Pentateuch, with its three codes of legislation, was composed, at various times, from eight hundred to a thousand or more years after Moses, and that the people were deluded by these “sacred writers,” representing all this as the teaching and the institutional work of their early leader; that very much of what we find in the prophetic books was not written by the men whose names they bear; that we have no sure ground for believing the patriarchs were real characters; that the records of Genesis prior to Abraham are not history, and that much else throughout the Old Testament that appears as narrative is to be either eliminated as interpolation or “late accretion,” or regarded as legend or mere poetic embellishment. And with all this, too, it must not be forgotten that certain of our “conservative” critics claim that the Jehovah of early Israel was but “a tribal god,” that

they looked to him "as the Moabites looked to Chemosh," and that it was late in their history before "the reality of other gods died out."*

Those whom we may call the Evangelical critics hold in their hearts the worshipful view of Jesus Christ, and are the sincere followers of the Lord. But we must not forget to what degree this may be owing to the spiritual apprehensions which became fixed in their youth and during the first years of their pulpit ministry, before their intellectual and speculative acceptance of what they call the "modern view of the Bible." Under these earlier convictions their experience took form. That type, and the momentum, as we may call it, of past years of ingrained religious experience, and the early influence of God's word upon them, despite the fact that their present theories tend to discredit that word—this holds them personally beyond the influence of their erroneous speculations to dislodge. But when we think of the younger generation of pupils encamping, it may be, at the outset on the Critics' ground without having been first for long years, and during the formative period of life, under the undisturbed sway (as these older scholars and professors more fortunately had been) of teachings which acknowledge the Scripture throughout, "not as the word of men but as it is, in truth, the word of God"—when we think of this we fear we are soon to see many who "concerning the faith have made shipwreck."

VI.

Suppose the critics whom we have been considering are right in their treatment of the Bible—then what? Where are we in that event? What would be the status of our

* George Adam Smith—who also attributes largely to Assyria the rise in Israel of the belief in Jehovah as the one God. By shattering the tribes and impressing the idea of unity in government, that Empire shattered the Semitic theory of religion—"a god for every tribe and a tribe for every god." The field was cleared of the many: there was room for the One.

Book, and what its power in the world? What the effect on the faith of the thousands of plain believers? Suppose it be drilled into the people that Scripture narratives by the score, which from childhood they have regarded as veritable, are but "cunningly-devised fables," some of them of The Jack and the Beanstalk order, and others, as figuring in a more important relation, elevated to the Romulus and Remus order of myth; that Abraham and the other patriarchs, whom they have looked upon as the beginning of the kingdom of God on the earth, were but names, and never had personal existence; that throughout the book on the part of those who, for ages past, have been denominated "sacred writers," and speaking with a "Thus saith the Lord" on their lips, there are mistakes, misrepresentations, perversion of facts, fraudulent literary methods, ill-assorted and disjointed arrangement of material; that supernaturalism, in its common meaning, is gone, and that events of history, recorded as if foretold by prophets in advance of their development, were written after their occurrence, and inserted, as Professor Cheyne does not hesitate to say, "after history had sharpened the eye of the prophet!" (As he also so naively remarks, "How easy for a prophet or his editor to manufacture predictions after the event"!)* That the Passover, which the New Testament associates with the sacrifice of Christ and the "blood of sprinkling," the story of Mount Sinai and the giving of the law, the appointment of the priesthood and the system of sacrifices and the Levitical order, and the Tabernacle structure, with its intricate paraphernalia—all which things are assumed as true


To somewhat like effect we have George Adam Smith, in his "Book of the Twelve Prophets," saying: "We shall find that hands have been busy with the text of the books long after the authors of these must have passed away * * * passages that are evidently intrusions, * * * reflecting a much later environment than their contents.' And, again: "The Prophetic books contain numerous signs that later generations wove their own brighter hopes into the abrupt and hopeless conclusions of prophecies of judgment."

by Christ and his apostles, and which, especially, are so interwoven in the epistle to the Hebrews—that these are but literary figments!


In our survey we have confined ourselves to the Old Testament. But the Old Testament and the New are all of one. This destructive criticism will prove itself impartial in its visitations. It has its eye now on the New Testament. Indeed, it has already made incursions and preliminary sorties in that territory, laying down, as its lines, such postulates as these: No pre-existent state to be claimed for Jesus Christ prior to his birth at Bethlehem; that birth only after the manner of ordinary generation, and “conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary” as much a myth as with them is the story of Eve formed out of Adam; Christ having divinity of nature only as we all have it (in degree, of course, less than his, but not differing in kind); his mental constitution such that we must predicate of it human limitations and defective knowledge, and the liability to mistakes; his miracles resolved into mist; his cross eviscerated of all sacrificial significance, and his resurrection explained away. Here then is the question, in case such a conception of the Bible should prevail—how long would the book retain its hold in any pre-eminent degree upon the mind and conscience of men? And in what reasonable sense could we continue to call it the Word of God? Our philologists who revel in linguistic and textual forms, our scholars who have a literary interest in ancient lore and in the comparative study of early religions, and our philosophical moralists who enjoy tracing the evolution of ethical ideas—these would still feel the intellectual fascination of the book. But for those whose interest in it is of a more practical and personal kind—for the plain and humble reader who takes it as true, first of all because he takes it as from God; for those, wanderers from God, it may be, but in whose hearts there still


linger the childhood impression of its sanctity and the charm of its tales and wonders which are associated in memory with a mother's tender voice as she read to her little ones; and for those men of affairs in the busy world, often thoughtful about higher things, but to whom the Critics' recommendation of the "Bible as literature," and as "a unique book" will make little appeal—alas, for these, Scripture will have lost forever its divine character, and will have forfeited its imperative right of way in the domain of faith and conscience.


DATE DUE

DEMCO 38-297

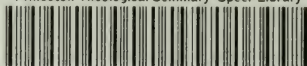
Gaylord 
PAMPHLET BINDER

 Syracuse, N. Y.

 Stockton, Calif.

BS500 .W72
A glance at the higher criticism.

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 00045 3367